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Public Diplomacy in the European Union: Models for Poland

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Diplomacy has been changing dramatically in recent years as a result of an adjustment to more interconnected and hybrid international relations. One of the signs of this change is more stress put on soft-power tools as public diplomacy. Classic diplomacy has shifted from the domain of politics to the public sphere, where public opinion is formed. Formerly latent diplomacy has become public diplomacy with the effect of a more symmetric conduct of international political communication. Poland's public diplomacy is conditioned by the country's size and its status as a "new" EU Member State, but there are lessons to be learned from strategies adopted by other countries in the European Union, particularly in the fields of culture, development aid, and education.

The Member States of the EU are well advanced in the implementation of public diplomacy in their foreign policy strategies and nowadays the European Union also has a Unit for Public Diplomacy and Election Observation within the new structure of the EEAS. Thus, whereas the EU aims the majority of its efforts at public diplomacy with its own members, the member countries have a long tradition of reaching out to their regions of interest first with cultural diplomacy, then also with public diplomacy.

The differences in the use of soft-power² tools among the countries in Europe are significant and might be relevant for relative newcomers in the field, such as Poland. France has the longest tradition of establishing institutions for cultural diplomacy, such as Alliance Francaise in 1883. Germany combines cultural and economic diplomacy under the umbrella of its so called foreign image policy. Great Britain attracted attention, including that of researchers, in the nineties when it introduced modernity into its traditionally conservative image, and consequently rebranded the country. For Germany and Great Britain, big sport events (the 2006 FIFA World Cup and 2012 Olympic Games, respectively) were milestones in their public diplomacy strategies. France, Germany and the Netherlands are convinced of the need to implement public diplomacy to diminish the tensions between societies rooted in World War II. Nordic and Scandinavian countries provide an example for positive soft-power effects of development aid programmes. Many European countries, including the three big members mentioned above but also the smaller Netherlands, have enhanced their position by resting on the attractive power of science and higher education. However,

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² The concept of soft power comes from J.S. Nye Jr., the author of *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs, New York, 2004.

it should not be overlooked that many European governments, including Poland, nowadays seem also to believe strongly in the power of images and brands and in the notion of rebranding as a tool of their soft power.

Poland's Steps into Public Diplomacy

The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) developed its first definitions of public diplomacy in 2000, with the current understanding (in 2014) focused on achieving results in public opinion with messages about Poland in order to build dialogical relations with the public abroad. Information on the website of the Polish MFA says public diplomacy is a strategic means serving to secure Polish interests globally.³ Polish public diplomacy is conducted by the MFA (Department of Public and Cultural Diplomacy) and other Ministries, coordinated by the intragovernmental Council for the Promotion of Poland, in cooperation with the Polish Tourist Organisation, Adam Mickiewicz Institute, and Polish Institutes abroad, as well as NGOs.

Promotion, brand, image, and public opinion comprise the most important notions of the Polish approach to the use of soft power means in international relations. As Polish society, and indeed the public in formerly communist countries after the transition process, is overly sensitive to international perception, much stress has been put on images and branding as core elements of Polish public diplomacy. The most recent document accepted by the Council for the Promotion of Poland is focused on the "Polish brand." In 2013, the MFA commissioned research on Poland's image abroad. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Economy continues its public relations campaign on Poland's economic branding.⁴

This focus on public diplomacy has gained more attention in recent years. Today, it is the most important tool for managing Polish soft-power assets, while coordinating cultural diplomacy, including international broadcasting, and frequently combined with economic diplomacy. The presidency of the EU Council in 2011 and EURO 2012 were milestones in both rebranding Poland and in the elaboration of the Polish approach to public diplomacy. As with other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Poland's efforts are strongly shaped by geopolitics, modelled on the Western members of the EU, and very much focused on branding, on the one hand, and on the politics of historical memory on the other.

Although the logic of the implementation of public diplomacy into the foreign policy of superpowers, middle powers and small countries differs significantly, it is worth drawing conclusions from the experiences of Germany, Poland's neighbour and most important economic partner, Great Britain, as possibly the most advanced country in implementing public diplomacy in Europe, and the Scandinavian and Nordic countries, due to their success in achieving the position of middle powers despite the low significance of their military assets. The Scandinavian and Nordic model rests on smart power,⁵ based on the convergence of economic welfare and soft-power assets. Their public diplomacy has been used to build coalitions and to influence the agenda of international relations.

In Poland, meanwhile, the implementation of public diplomacy marks an important step in the modernisation of foreign policy, and at the same time means there has been acceptance of the logic of mediated political communication internationally.

For Poland, Geopolitics Matters

Poland, as with all of the new ex-communist members of the EU, is convinced of the importance of geopolitics in public diplomacy strategies. Geopolitics is decisive for defining target countries, the preferred tools of public diplomacy, and the way they are to be used. Relations with both of Poland's large

³ www.msz.gov.pl/en, accessed 10 January 2014.

⁴ "Zasady komunikacji marki Polska" ('Principles for Communicating the Polish Brand'), "Badanie opinii 'Określenie wizerunku, który Polska powinna promować za granicą'" ('Opinion Survey: 'Specifying the Image Poland Should Promote Abroad') Final Report, November 2013, www.msz.gov.pl; "Marka Polskiej Gospodarki" ('Brand of the Polish Economy'), www.mg.gov.pl, accessed 10 December 2013.

⁵ The concept of smart power was developed by Nye. See: J.S. Nye, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

neighbours—Germany and Russia—are of prime significance. On the one hand, the EU, with Germany as the most important partner for Poland, means the region is of prime relevance to all of the strategies for positioning Poland through the use of soft-power tools. On the other hand, Russian actions in its “near abroad” have encouraged Poland to target the Eastern Partnership countries (Ukraine being the most important among them) with public and cultural diplomacy efforts.

The size of a country matters in terms of perception and its chosen public diplomacy strategy, but in the case of the Netherlands this is relative within, and even consciously related to its strategies. During World War II, the country presented itself to the American audience as “small Netherlands,” a victim of its big German neighbour, in order to persuade the U.S. to participate in the war. To preserve its power over Indonesia, the Dutch government used the concept of a “great Netherlands.”⁶ In 2013, the Dutch Advisory Committee on Modernising the Diplomatic Service found more advantages than disadvantages in the Netherlands’ small size, claiming in a basic document on the future of Dutch diplomacy that a small country’s diplomacy might be open and “unconventional,” as the impact of geopolitics on a small actor is less relevant.⁷ Paradoxically, not only the Dutch but also the German government claimed that globalisation has rendered countries smaller.⁸

Hence, being medium in size and located between Germany and Russia, Poland has, on one hand, been forced to make much effort to gain credibility, support, and visibility in a multipolar world, and, on the other, to fight with the socio-psychological, long-lasting consequences of World War II at the domestic level. One of the tools in the process is public diplomacy with a domestic dimension.

The cases of Canada and Norway show that the best strategy for public diplomacy that supports a positive perception of small and medium-size countries is to present national politics as “serving the global good.”⁹ Poland primarily strives to play the role of a good citizen of Europe (specifically in the EU), but at the same time, using the definition of public diplomacy from the Polish MFA presented above, it also includes the global dimension. A look at large European countries reveals that nowadays their governments are refocusing their diplomatic efforts on emerging economies, in particular the BRIC(S) countries.¹⁰ Changes in the targeted countries can also be observed in international broadcasting. The BBC ended its programmes in Polish in 2005 as necessary to establish new services in Arabic and Persian. Poland also has to decide again to re-select its target countries and regions for its public (and economic) diplomacy. The Arab Spring during the Polish presidency of the Council of the EU in 2011 proved well the necessity for reaching new regions with Polish soft-power tools. Still, Poland’s international position in this case gave the country European but not global visibility.

Cool Polska?

The convergence of public and cultural diplomacy is typical for the majority of European countries with a long tradition of cultural diplomacy, and nowadays also for Poland. The Polish specifics rest on the importance of culture and history and respond well to the understanding of public diplomacy as a narrative¹¹ in which societies transmit their culture abroad while using the means of cultural diplomacy and international communication. Poland stresses the apparent exclusion of Eastern European heritage

⁶ J.D. Snyder, “The Problem of Power in Modern Public Diplomacy: The Netherlands Information Bureau in World War II and the Early Cold War,” in: K.A. Osgood, B.C. Etheridge (eds.), *The United States and Public Diplomacy: New Directions in Cultural and International History*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Leiden–Boston, 2010, p. 62.

⁷ “Modernizing Dutch Diplomacy,” Progress Report by the Advisory Committee on Modernizing the Diplomatic Service, 29 May 2013, www.clinegndael.nl/publication/modernising-dutch-diplomacy, accessed 10 July 2013, p. 16.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 17; and, “Konzeption: Auswärtige Kultur- und Bildungspolitik in Zeiten der Globalisierung – Partner gewinnen, Werte Vermitteln, Interessen vertreten,” September 2011, www.auswaertiges-amt.de.

⁹ A.K. Henrikson, “Niche Diplomacy in the World Public Arena: The Global ‘Corners’ of Canada and Norway,” in: J. Melissen (ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, Palgrave MacMillan, London, 2005, p. 75.

¹⁰ “Modernizing Dutch Diplomacy,” *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹¹ As seen in C. Schneider, *Culture Communicates: US Diplomacy That Works*, Discussion Papers on Diplomacy, no. 94, Clingendael, 2004.

from the mainstream European memory before 1989, and thus has been engaged in reintroducing the CEE countries' narrative to the European mainstream.

Polish public diplomacy is on the way to finding a balance between presenting its tragic and glorious past and its successful modernisation (this dichotomy also reflects well the cleavages in Polish society). In associating tradition with modernisation, Poland can rest on the experiences of Great Britain. The former superpower managed to reshape its image, concentrated on the tradition of the British monarchy, while including into the key message the achievements of modern Britain in the nineties. The process is well described by the idea of "Cool Britain," a notion in fashion under the government of Tony Blair. Starting with branding campaigns in the nineties, Britain rooted its public diplomacy after 2002 in strategic communication, providing it with a broader context.¹² Since the end of the 20th century, more countries have been following the idea of combining the glorious past, thriving traditional culture, and modernity into their key messages. Poland should go this direction, abandoning the notion of being "cool," as it has been implemented too frequently in the last 20 years (even outside Europe—"Cool Japan"), but putting stress on the two pillars supporting Poland in its role as a CEE regional leader: tradition and modernity.

According to the Dutch experience of a small country building its international position on soft-power assets, a thriving culture contributes to economic growth, and arts and cultural exchanges are relevant tools of foreign policy.¹³ Science and education should be added to the list. While winning foreign students, many countries have built a network of stakeholders who have acquired their education in the country.

Academic and student exchanges seem to be highly neglected in Polish efforts to implement public diplomacy. As the Spanish Elcano Global Presence Index (IEPG) shows, the Czech Republic is able to attract many more foreign students than Poland.¹⁴ In the UK, international students contribute more than £10 billion to the high education market.¹⁵ Academic and student exchanges comprise an important part of German foreign cultural and educational policy. In Germany, there is a Unit on Science and High Schools within the Department of Culture and Communication, supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), which is a partner of the German MFA in the conduct of foreign cultural policy.¹⁶

Speaking to the World: The Power of Broadcasting

France, Germany and Great Britain traditionally include international broadcasting into their models of public diplomacy or foreign cultural policy. Support for this comes from their history, international positions and in the fact that French, German and English play the role of languages of wider communication. Before the fall of the Iron Curtain, Poland belonged to the Soviet informational empire and at the same time received U.S. and Western European radio. The Velvet Revolution did not change Poland's role on the informational periphery.

A medium-size country striving to be a middle power has an opportunity to play the role of an informational neighbour in relation to smaller countries (in this case, to the east) and to improve its position in international communication while including media into democracy promotion. The main document on the promotion of Poland from 2009 signals the need to invest in radio and television broadcasting, including online service for the public abroad, but it does not define the role of international broadcasters in public diplomacy.¹⁷ This part of Polish public diplomacy seems to be underestimated by the

¹² J. Pammet, *New Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century: A Comparative Study of Policy and Practice*, Routledge, New York, 2013, pp. 71–72.

¹³ "Foreign Policy Agenda 2011," www.minbuza.nl.

¹⁴ According to the 2012 IEPG, Czech Republic gained 53 points for education (the category is related to the number of foreign students in the country), whereas Poland was 28 (compared to Hungary at 24 and Slovakia at 12), see, www.iepg.es. Education comprises 12% of the states' soft-power presence in the IEPG.

¹⁵ J. Pammet, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

¹⁶ "Organisations Plan," www.auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/382698/publicationFile/188953/Organisationsplan-Druckversion.pdf, accessed 10 January 2014.

¹⁷ "Kierunki promocji Polski do 2015 r." ("Directions of Polish Promotion to 2015"), document accepted by the Council of Promoting Poland, December 2009.

Polish MFA. Small and medium-size countries traditionally invest in radio for foreign audiences and radio and television stations for their diasporas. Nowadays, they develop these services online.

Poland has launched radio (Radio Racja—Radio Reason and European Radio for Belarus) and television stations (Belsat TV) aimed at a Belarusian audience. Belsat TV, supported by the MFA and TVP (Polish public service television), has the aim to promote democracy while substituting for the lack of uncensored information sources in Belarus. Although Belsat TV should be seen as an important project of Polish public diplomacy, it is not coordinated by the Department of Public and Cultural Diplomacy but by the Eastern Department and Department of Development Cooperation in the MFA, together with representatives of the public service broadcaster. Belsat TV promulgates the core values of the EU, such as democracy and freedom of the press. Although the channel is recognised as Polish by only 13.9% of viewers,¹⁸ it maintains its relevance to public diplomacy purposes for the long term, which corresponds well to the symmetrical model of new public diplomacy. Despite its high costs, all of the political parties in Poland support the channel. Belsat is also supported by European middle powers Sweden and Norway, and Deutsche Welle from Germany, as it fits well into their understanding of democracy promotion.

Economic Power and Its Soft Lining

Germany illustrates the case of a country that for a long time has rested on its cultural diplomacy and positive perception of its products globally. In the nineties, the coordination of the two fields and the implementation of the country's branding proved to be necessary. R. Hülse called the new model "catwalk" diplomacy, thanks to the employment of Claudia Schiffer, the famous German supermodel, in the country's branding campaigns.¹⁹ There is much evidence that small and medium-size states can achieve much with their public diplomacy if they have sound economies and their societies enjoy high living standards. Some of them, such as Sweden, have relied on the country-of-origin effect or on flagship brands, products and companies, such as IKEA. The living standards of Nordic and Scandinavian countries have contributed to their perception as middle powers as early as the turn of the eighties and nineties.

This path can hardly be followed by small and medium-size CEE states. On the one hand, they cannot build their narrative on high living standards and sound economies, as they have erected their market economies quite recently. Poland does not have any internationally recognisable flagship products. On the other hand, within the EU Poland has achieved a positive image due to its economic performance since the 2008 economic crisis began and its newly gained political stability. Soft-power assets were thus used as vehicles for proliferating good news about positive changes in the country. These developments might again be best illustrated by data from the Spanish Instituto Elcano, which shows that economic growth has had the most important impact on Poland's global perception.²⁰

Democracy Promotion

Middle powers are very active in development aid. Poland, as with almost all CEE countries, is a newcomer to development aid and democracy promotion, but both areas seem promising fields for diplomatic efforts and have their niches in public diplomacy. All new members of the EU are willing to share knowhow on the transition to democracy with the countries of the Eastern Partnership and Western Balkans, and with other regions, such as North Africa since 2011. In their democratisation efforts, they have been supported by the Nordic and Scandinavian countries, which promulgate the core ideas of European democracy themselves.

Since the CEE EU states' engagement in development cooperation has a short track record, it is difficult to state if it is functional in their public diplomacy goals. For Poland, the field seems to be promising, as the

¹⁸ "Ponad połowa posiadaczy anten satelitarnych ogląda Biełsat" ("More Than Half of Satellite Dish Owners Watch Belsat"), *Belsat*, <http://belsat.eu/pl/aktualności>, accessed 6 September 2012.

¹⁹ R. Hülse, "The Catwalk Power: Germany's New Foreign Image Policy," *Journal of International Relations and Development*, vol. 12, no. 3, September 2009, pp. 293–316.

²⁰ See: IEPG database, www.iepg.es.

vast majority of Polish society supports Polish engagement abroad.²¹ Some evidence might be derived from the British case, such as the Department for International Development, which was included into the Public Diplomacy Strategy Board established in 2002.²²

Promotion of democracy is one of several potential niches for Polish public diplomacy, as the Polish government and NGOs have joined in sharing knowhow on the transition to democracy with the Eastern neighbours. The Eastern Partnership is a flagship initiative of Poland within the framework of the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy. Development cooperation constitutes a new specialisation, one potentially important for the perception of the country in the international community.

Conclusion

Polish public diplomacy has come of age. The realisation of its importance supports the country's efforts to present itself as a reliable and stable partner and as a good citizen of the international community. The significant improvement in the perception of Poland in recent years is due to its stable economic growth despite the 2008 crisis and its predictable foreign policy since 2007. Combining these two variables with public diplomacy, Poland has nearly achieved a reputation as a good citizen of the European (and international) community and one typical of middle powers. However, Polish efforts to achieve the status of a regional leader with global visibility are too focused on nation-branding and images. There is still no strategy for Polish public diplomacy that would set the objectives and harmonise the efforts of all the actors in the field.

Although the international position and role of Germany differs significantly from Poland after 1989, Germany's foreign image policy and the implementation of German foreign cultural policy for conflict prevention might have a normative impact on Polish public diplomacy. German foreign cultural policy stands as the third pillar of German foreign policy, putting the stress on the soft-power assets of the country on the one hand, but also on the implementation of cultural diplomacy for conflict prevention, on the other. If Polish efforts are to achieve their objectives and not to be limited to country branding, the German approach might be relevant. Further work on coordination is inevitable. Nevertheless, coordination does not mean a need for a central body but rather a smart convergence of public, cultural and economic diplomacy. The inclusion of international broadcasting into the strategies of Polish promotion is a fact, and now it should be followed by the incorporation of it into the Department of Public and Cultural Diplomacy or into a new strategy of public diplomacy. Belsat TV is an exceptional project, and as such needs more publicity.

Democracy promotion and development cooperation are promising fields for a future Polish public diplomacy strategy. The same must be said about academic exchanges and education, which at the moment hardly contribute to Poland's global soft-power presence. The universities in the country are not as prominent as those in other European countries, but their network-building potential can no longer be ignored by the Polish government. Both fields would allow Poland to attract stakeholders from outside Europe and to gain global visibility. Investing in stipends for African students could replace the lack of Polish Institutes in Africa.

As neither a big nor small European country, Poland has to define the role it strives for through an internal debate and achieve consensus at home on the subject—a process that illustrates the domestic dimension of public diplomacy.

²¹ "Polska pomoc: badania opinii publicznej" ("Polish Aid: Public Opinion Surveys"), 2005–2011, www.polskapomoc.gov.pl/badania,opiniipublicznej,128.html, accessed 27 July 2012.

²² J. Pammet, *op. cit.*, p. 73.